03 Food safety and nutrition procedures
03.7 Packed Lunch & Healthy Eating Policy

Rationale

The Government places a duty on early years settings to promote children's health and well-being. Eating a healthy, balanced diet is essential for children's growth, development and long-term health. As an influential setting, Ringrose Kindergarten plays an important role in supporting families to establish healthy eating habits from an early age.

Good nutrition in childhood helps children to:

- Be fitter and healthier now and in later life
- Grow, develop and maintain good overall health
- Concentrate, learn effectively and behave positively

There is increasing concern that many children consume too much fat, sugar and salt, and not enough fibre, fruit and vegetables. Poor dietary choices can have short-term effects such as:

- Tooth decay
- Poor growth
- Obesity
- Anaemia
- Constipation
- Poor concentration and behavioural difficulties

In the longer term, unhealthy diets in childhood can increase the risk of serious health conditions in adulthood, including heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.
Packed lunches can contribute up to a third of a child's weekly food intake. It is therefore important that they are nutritious, balanced and safe. Ofsted also considers how settings promote children's personal development and well-being, which includes food provision and packed lunches.

Aims

- To ensure packed lunches are safe, healthy and nutritious
- To support parents in providing balanced packed lunches in line with national school food standards
- To promote a positive and inclusive dining experience for all children
- To ensure the safety of children with allergies, particularly nut allergies

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Packed Lunch Arrangements

Children attending Ringrose Kindergarten for full days may:

- Bring a packed lunch from home, or
- Sign up for lunches provided by **V&Me**, which are delivered to the nursery

Ringrose Kindergarten will work in partnership with parents to encourage healthy packed lunches.

Food Safety and Storage

- Packed lunches must be brought to nursery **in a named lunchbox or bag**
- We **cannot heat or reheat food** due to food safety risks
- Hot food must be provided in a **thermos flask**
- Packed lunches are stored in a **cool, dry place**
- Free drinking water is available to all children

Nut-Free Policy

Ringrose Kindergarten operates a **strict NO NUT policy**.
Some children in our care are at risk of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis), which can be life-threatening. Therefore:

- **No nuts or nut products** may be brought into nursery under any circumstances
- This includes peanut butter, Nutella, cereal bars containing nuts, and foods labelled “may contain nuts”
- We ask all parents to check ingredients carefully before packing lunches.

What to Include in a Healthy Packed Lunch

Packed lunches **should include the following every day**:

Energy foods (preferably wholegrain):
- Bread, wraps, pittas, pasta, rice, couscous, chapattis

Protein foods:
- Meat, fish, eggs
- Dairy products
- Lentils, beans, hummus

Fruit and vegetables:
- At least **one portion of fruit**
- At least **one portion of vegetables**
- Grapes and cherry tomatoes must be **cut lengthways**
- Carrots and cucumber should be **cut into batons**

Dairy or alternatives:
- Milk, cheese, yoghurt, custard
- Calcium-enriched plant-based alternatives

Foods That Can Be Included Occasionally

(Approximately once per week)
- Meat-based items such as sausage rolls or pies

Foods That Should Never Be Included

- Crisps or other high-salt snacks
  (Alternatives include plain popcorn, breadsticks, vegetable sticks, seeds or savoury crackers)

- Confectionery such as sweets or chocolate bars (Alternatives include fruit or flapjack)
- Fizzy drinks or squash (including no-added-sugar or sugar-free drinks) These contain sweeteners, encourage a preference for sweet tastes and can contribute to tooth decay

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Dining Experience and Inclusion

- Children bringing packed lunches and those having school dinners will sit together
- A safe, clean and calm eating environment is provided
- We offer a homely, independent, respectful environment by having plates for packed lunches to go on rather than children eating out of their lunch boxes
- The children take it in turns to be lunchtime monitors to lay the tables with plates, knives, forks, spoons, cups and napkins.
- Staff support children to develop independence and good table manners
- Mealtimes are calm, social and inclusive
- We remind children that they need to have a drink by helping themselves from the water jug provided
- We encourage children to open their own lunches and replace them in the lunch on the trolley afterwards, promoting independence and self-help skills
- Children are encouraged to clear the table after lunch and help clean the tables
- All children will wash and dry hands before and after eating
- Children with food allergies or intolerances will be supported by lunchtime supervisors
- Children who are showing signs of 'strong food preferences, or aversions to food' are not forced to eat anything they do not want to.
- Staff recognise the signs that a child has had enough and remove uneaten food without comment.
- Children are not made to stay at the table after others have left if they refuse to eat certain items of food.
- Staff work in partnership with parents/carers to support them with children who are showing signs of 'food preference or aversion' and sign post them to further advice, for example, How to Manage Simple Faddy Eating in Toddlers (Infant & Toddler Forum) https://infantandtoddlerforum.org/health-and-childcare-professionals/factsheets/

Waste and Disposal

Where possible, uneaten packed lunch items will be sent home. This allows parents to:

- Monitor what their child has eaten
- Discuss any concerns about food intake with nursery staff

Monitoring, Assessment and Review

- The nursery will carry out an **annual packed lunch audit**
- Lunchtime supervisors will reward healthy packed lunches in line with our reward scheme
- If packed lunches do not meet the policy standards:
- A copy of the policy will be sent home
- If concerns continue, parents will be invited to discuss this with nursery staff

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Useful Links

- Food for Life Packed lunches Guidance
- School Food Standards – GOV.UK
- NHS Healthier Families – Lunchbox ideas and recipes
- Food Standards Agency – food.gov.uk Early Years Food Choking Hazards
- Early Years Foundation Stage Nutrition Guidance (2025)